

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 ISO-00 SMS-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 TRSE-00
XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 STR-07 CEA-01
SPTA-02 OES-09 DOE-15 SOE-02 /140 W
-----003869 300437Z /14

R 291340Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6148
INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PN, UR
SUBJECT: SOVIET-PANAMANIAN TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

REF: (A) 77 PANAMA 5212, (B) MOSCOW 16664

1. TASS ITEM IN IZVESTIYA AUGUST 28 AND TASS ECONOMIC DAILY AUGUST 25 REPORT THAT PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT DELEGATION, HEADED BY MFA USSR AND EAST EUROPEAN DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR AMBASSADOR PEDRO BRIN MARTINEZ, VISITED USSR AUGUST 20-27 TO DISCUSS "OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION." TASS ECONOMIC DAILY STATES THAT THE TALKS WERE HELD WITH USSR STATE COMMITTEE FOR FOREIGN ECONOMIC RELATIONS, WHICH IS BODY LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTRATION OF FOREIGN ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. IZVESTIYA NOTED DELEGATION WAS RECEIVED AT MFA AND OTHER MINISTRIES WHERE TALKS TOUCHED ON "MUTUAL STRIVING BY THE SIDES FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF TIES AND CONTACTS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES IN VARIOUS AREAS."

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2. ECONOMIC DAILY REPORT DESCRIBES DELEGATION'S VISIT AS A "FACT-FINDING MISSION." PANAMANIAN EXPRESSED INTEREST IN OBTAINING SOVIET ASSISTANCE IN BUILDING 300 THOUSAND KW HYDROELECTRIC PLANT, A TOPIC RAISED DURING VISIT OF SOVIET TRADE DEL TO PANAMA IN JULY 1977 (REFTEL A). SOVIETS AGREED TO "STUDY POSSIBILITIES" FOR BUILDING SUCH A PROJECT. OTHER AREAS DISCUSSED

WERE POSSIBLE ASSISTANCE IN 1) CONSTRUCTION OF PLANT TO REPAIR EQUIPMENT FOR THE SUGAR INDUSTRY, 2) FERROUS METALLURGY, AND 3) TEXTILE INDUSTRY. TASS REPORT STATES THAT, ALTHOUGH USSR AND PANAMA DO NOT HAVE INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT ON ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION "IT IS NOT RULED OUT" THAT SUCH AN AGREEMENT MAY BE SIGNED "SHORTLY."

3. COMMENT: THE REFERENCE TO A FRAMEWORK ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL AGREEMENT, IS PRESENTED IN CONTEXT OF AGREEMENTS SIGNED LAST YEAR WITH GUYANA, JAMAICA, AND COSTA RICA. PROPOSED AGREEMENT PROBABLY WOULD NOT RESULT IN MAJOR INCREASE IN MINISCULE SOVIET-PANAMANIAN TRADE, WHICH LAST YEAR AMOUNTED ONLY TO \$5.7 MILLION, ALL SOVIET EXPORTS. IN THIS CONNECTION, IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT ECONOMIC DAILY REPORT MADE NO REFERENCE TO POSSIBLE SOVIET IMPORTS FROM PANAMA.

4. SUCH AN AGREEMENT WOULD, HOWEVER, GIVE SUBSTANCE TO IZVESTIYA'S REFERENCE TO "MUTUAL STRIVING" BY BOTH COUNTRIES TO DEVELOP SOVIET-PANAMANIAN TIES, AND PROVIDE OPTICAL EVIDENCE OF DISTANCING OF PANAMA FROM EXCLUSIVE US INFLUENCE. GARRISON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TRADE, PRESS COMMENTS, REPORTS, NEGOTIATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MOSCOW20692
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780353-0705
Format: TEL
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780813/aaaaakuf.tel
Line Count: 85
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 43dff759-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 PANAMA 5212, 78 MOSCOW 16664
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1591472
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOVIET-PANAMANIAN TRADE NEGOTIATIONS
TAGS: ETRD, PN, UR
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/43dff759-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014